

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-04 AID-20 OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

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R 230500Z OCT 73

FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9258

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMCONSUL MEDAN

AMCONSUL SURABAYA

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 JAKARTA 12497

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ID

SUBJECT: THE THAI UPHEAVAL: COULD IT HAPPEN HERE?

REF : BANGKOK 16206 AND PREVIOUS

SUMMARY: THE THAI UPHEAVAL HAS WORRIED GENERALS IN  
JAKARTA AS ELSEWHERE IN ASIA AND CAUSED OBSERVERS  
OF THE INDONESIAN SCENE TO WONDER IF IT COULD HAPPEN  
HERE. HOWEVER, DESPITE A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE OF  
STUDENT IRRITATION WITH MILITARY RULE AND SOME  
RECENT REVIVAL OF STUDENT ACTIVISM, IT IS UNLIKELY  
THAT A THAI-STYLE HAPPENING IS ON THE HORIZON.  
INDONESIAN STUDENTS ARE WEAKLY ORGANIZED AND  
PROFOUNDLY DIVIDED ALONG COMMUNAL LINES. MOREOVER  
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THEY SHARE IN COMMON WITH THE RULING GENERALS AN

AWARENESS THAT ANY PROFOUND CONVULSION WOULD ENTAIL THE RISK OF PLUNGING THE COUNTRY BACK INTO PRE-1966 CHAOS, A PROSPECT THAT IS PLEASING TO NO ONE. IT REMAINS A VALID TRUISM THAT UPHEAVAL IN INDONESIA WOULD PROBABLY BE INITIATED BY INFIGHTING AT TOP LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT, A PROSPECT WHICH IS NOT PROBABLE AT THE MOMENT.  
END SUMMARY

1. AS ELSEWHERE IN ASIA WHERE MILITARY-DOMINATED REGIMES HOLD POWER, EVENTS IN THAILAND HAVE CAUSED A RIPPLE OF UNEASE AMONG TOP GENERALS IN JAKARTA AND ILL-SUPPRESSED SATISFACTION AMONG SOME STUDENTS AND OTHERS WHO SOMETIMES WISH THAT IT MIGHT HAPPEN HERE. SEVERAL STUDENT LEADERS HAVE EXPRESSED SYMPATHY WITH THE THAI STUDENTS AND TERMED THEIR ACHIEVEMENT "BRAVER AND MORE REMARKABLE" THAN INDONESIA'S ANTI-SUKARNO STUDENT MOVEMENT OF 1966. EVENTS IN THAILAND HAVE DRAWN ALL THE MORE ATTENTION BECAUSE OF RECENT EVENTS HERE. THANKS TO DEBATE OVER A CONTROVERSIAL MARRIAGE LAW WHICH IS ANATHEMA TO ACTIVIST MOSLEMS, PLUS EXPRESSIONS OF SYMPATHY FOR ARAB CAUSE IN THE MIDDLE EAST, AND OPPOSITION TO A CAMPAIGN BY THE AUTHORITIES AGAINST LONG HAIR, STUDENT ACTIVISM WHICH ALMOST TOTALLY DIED AWAY AFTER 1970 HAS BEEN ENJOYING SOMETHING OF A REVIVAL.

2. ON THE HAIR ISSUE, FOR EXAMPLE, BANDUNG STUDENTS RECENTLY LEVELLED RAUCOUS CRITICISM AT GENERAL SUMITRO (THE MOST POWERFUL MILITARY MAN IN THE COUNTRY NEXT TO THE PRESIDENT) AND THIRTEEN MOSLEM YOUTHS ARE STILL UNDER DETENTION FOR DEMONSTRATING AGAINST THE MARRIAGE BILL. LIKE MOST POLITICALLY AWARE INDONESIAN CIVILIANS, STUDENTS ARE ALSO DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT RAMPANT CORRUPTION, ESCALATING PRICES, HORRENDOUS UN- AND UNDER-EMPLOYMENT, INEFFICIENT AND OFTEN ARBITRARY GOVERNMENT, AND THE PROSPECT OF OPEN-CONFIDENTIAL

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ENDED MONOPOLY OF POLITICAL POWER BY THE "GREEN SHIRTS", I.E., THE ARMY. MOREOVER STUDENTS PLAYED A KEY ROLE IN PAST REVOLUTIONS (INCLUDING THE EVENTS OF 1945 AND 1965-66) AND THE PRESENT GENERATION BELIEVES THAT IT TOO HAS AN OBLIGATION TO ACT AS THE CONSCIENCE OF THE NATION.

3. ALL THIS MAY AT FIRST LOOK RATHER SIMILAR

TO THE RECENT SCENE IN THAILAND. NEVERTHELESS IT WOULD BE RASH TO CONCLUDE THAT A MAJOR THAI-STYLE UPHEAVAL WILL OCCUR HERE IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. BASED ON OUR READING OF BANGKOK'S EXCELLENT REPORTING WE SEE SEVERAL CRUCIAL DIFFERENCES, THE MOST IMPORTANT OF WHICH IS THE RELATIVE WEAKNESS OF THE STUDENT MOVEMENT IN INDONESIA. LIKE INDONESIAN SOCIETY AT LARGE, THE STUDENT WORLD HERE IS STILL DEEPLY DIVIDED BY PROFOUND ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS CLEAVAGES ON A SCALE WHICH DOES NOT EXIST IN THAILAND. STUDENTS ARE ALSO ORGANIZATIONALLY FRAGMENTED. THE GRAND ANTI-SUKARNO FRONT OF 1966-67 WHICH WAS FORMED AND SUSTAINED WITH ARMY BACKING HAD DISINTEGRATED BY 1969. LEADERS OF THAT MOVEMENT - THE SO-CALLED "GENERATION OF 66" - HAVE DEPARTED, BUT THEY HAVE NOT YET BEEN REPLAED BY BY OTHERS OF EQUAL STATURE.

4. MOREOVER THE RESULTS OF RECENT STUDENT ACTIVISM HAVE BEEN DEPLY DISCOURAGING. THE ANTI-CORRUPTION AND OTHER PROTEST MOVEMENTS OF 1969-70 GOT ACTIVE SUPPORT FROM ONLY A TINY WESTERNIZED FRINGE OF STUDENTS AND WERE (IN EARLY 1972) THE OBJECT OF A HARSH AND DISCOURAGING PUTDOWN FROM PRESIDENT SUHARTO AT THE TIME OF THE "MINIATURE INDONESIA" UPROAR. STUDENT LEADERS WERE REINFORCED IN THEIR BELIEF THAT TO ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING REVOLUTIONARY THEY MUST HAVE AT LEAST A PART OF THE ARMY ON THEIR SIDE, AS IN 1966. (THEY HAVE PROJECTED THIS CONVICTION ONTO THE THAI SITUATION AND IN ANALYZING THE LATTER ARE PROFESSING BELIEF THAT YOUNGER MILITARY OFFICERS

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MUST RPT MUST HAVE BEEN IN BACK OF THE STUDENT INSURGENTS.)

5. BESIDES COMMUNAL DIVISIONS AND LACK OF ORGANIZATION STRENGTH, STUDENTS ARE WEAKENED BY WHAT MIGHT BE TERMED ELITE STATUS WITHOUT (FOR THE MOST PART) AFFLUENCE. ON THE ONE HAND, THEY ARE ALIENATED FROM THE INDONESIAN MASSES, YET ON THE OTHER HAND THEY THEMSELVES ARE USUALLY ANYTHING BUT RICH AND REMAIN MOST CONCERNED ABOUT GUT ISSUES SUCH AS JOB PROSPECTS AFTER GRADUATION. BECAUSE INDONESIA IS STILL SO FAR FROM AFFLUENCE, THE NEW LEFT HAS YET TO RAISE ITS HEAD HERE, AND MODERN RADICALISM DOES NOT YET EXIST AS A FORCE WHICH MIGHT TIE THE DISPARATE TRADITIONAL

GROUPS TOGETHER. (OLD STYLE COMMUNISM REMAINS AN  
UNTHINKABLE ALTERNATIVE THANKS TO THE EVENTS OF  
1965-66.)

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6. IT SHOULD NOT BE THOUGHT THAT THE STUDENTS'  
RELUCTANCE TO CONFRONT THE MILITARY IS BASED MERELY  
ON APATHY OR UNDER-EVALUATION OF THEIR OWN  
POTENTIAL STRENGTH. PERHAPS UNLIKE THE SITUATION  
IN THAILAND, THE STUDENTS AND MILITARY HERE, (HAVING  
WORKED TOGETHER IN THE PAST), HAVE A SHREWD IDEA  
OF EACH OTHERS' CAPACTIY. THE STUDENTS KNOW THAT  
IN THEIR CURRENT STATE OF DIVIDED WEAKNESS A  
CONTEST WITH THE SECURITY FORCES WOULD BE SHORT  
AND ONE-SIDED. MOREOVER THOSE WESTERNIZED  
AND MODERNIST MOSLEM ELEMENTS WHO WOULD BE THE  
MOST LIKELY INITIATORS OF A SERIOUS CHALLENGE,

KNOW THAT THE MILITARY CAN MANIPULATE COMMUNAL  
CLEAVAGES AGAINST THEM. THE ARMY DID THIS IN  
EARLY 1971 BY SUBTLY THREATENING TO BACK  
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TRADITIONAL JAVANESE NATIONALISTS WHO ARE BOTH  
ANTI-MOSLEM AND ANTI-WESTERN (AND WHO WERE THE  
MAIN ELEMENTS IN THE LATE SUKARNO'S POPULARITY)  
AGAINST THE STUDENTS DURING THE ANTI-CORRUPTION  
CAMPAIGN. PARTLY AS A RESULT, STUDENT LEADERS  
RETIRED FROM THE BATTLEFIELD. WHILE INDONESIAN  
AUTHORITIES MAY LACK SKILLS IN MANY AREAS,  
MANIPULATIVE INTERNAL POLITICS IS NOT ONE OF  
THEM, AND THE STUDENTS KNOW THIS ALSO. (THIS  
AWARENESS AND RESULTING CAUTION DOES NOT EXTEND  
TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, WHO ARE TRADITIONALLY  
MUCH MORE EMOTIONAL AND VOLATILE, BUT WHO ARE  
INCAPABLE OF ORGANIZING THEMSELVES AROUND A  
COHERENT SET OF REVOLUTIONARY AIMS.)

7. THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL RESTRAINING ELEMENT  
IN THE INDONESIAN SITUATION IS THE FACT THAT  
NO PROFOUND CONFRONTATION COULD DEVELOP WHICH  
WOULD NOT ENTAIL THE RISK OF RETROGRESSING INTO  
PRE-1966 POLITICAL DISUNITY AND ECONOMIC STAGNATION.  
DESPITE GROWING CRITICISM OF THE NEW ORDER'S FAILINGS,  
NO ONE (INCLUDING STUDENTS) HAS YET COME TO SEE  
THIS AS AN ACCEPTABLE RISK. THANKS TO UNPLEASANT  
MEMORIES OF THE SUKARNO ERA, INDONESIA IS STILL  
IN A "POST REVOLUTIONARY" FRAME OF MIND. NEITHER  
THE STUDENTS NOR ANYONE ELSE CAN OFFER A POLITICAL  
ALTERNATIVE TO ARMY-DOMINATED GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD  
NOT IMMEDIATELY OPEN A PANDORA'S BOX OF COMMUNAL  
TENSIONS, SERIOUSLY ENDANGERING HARD-WON NATIONAL  
UNITY. FOR THIS REASON, AND IN DRAMATIC CONTRAST  
TO THAILAND, NO ONE HERE IS DEMANDING BASIC STRUCTURAL  
CHANGE SUCH AS ALTERATION OF THE  
1945 CONSTITUTION WHICH BECAUSE IT GIVES  
STRONG BUT ILL-DEFINED POWERS TO THE PRESIDENT  
(AND LITTLE INSTITUTIONALIZED STRENGTH TO ANYTHING  
ELSE) IS A MAJOR FACTOR PERPETUATING MILITARY RULE.  
ALSO IN CONTRAST TO THAILAND, THERE IS NO MONARCHY  
HERE WHICH MIGHT PROVIDE A NEUTRAL FACTOR TO INSURE  
SOME DEGREE OF CONTINUITY IN THE EVENT THAT TOP  
GENERALS WERE DEPOSED.

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8. IT IS ALSO WORTH NOTING THAT IN INDONESIAN, INDIVIDUAL ARMY PERSONALITIES HAVE YET TO BECOME CONSPICUOUS TARGETS OF POPULAR RESENTMENT. GENERAL SUMITRO HAS OFTEN BEEN COMPARED TO PRAPHAAT (THEY CERTAINLY HAVE IN COMMON BOTH TOUGHNESS AND OBESITY) BUT ALTHOUGH SUMITRO IS FEARED BY MANY HE IS ALSO ADMIRER FOR HIS BRAINS, DECISIVENESS AND RELATIVE UNCORRUPTNESS. HIS REPUTATION WITH THE INTELLECTUALS HAS JUST GONE UP SEVERAL NOTCHES THANKS TO HIS APPARENT WILLINGNESS TO RE-EXAMINE THE QUESTION OF POLITICAL PRISONERS DETAINED ON BURU ISLAND. THERE IS NO OTHER GENERAL (CERTAINLY NOT THE PRESIDENT) WHO AT THIS MOMENT STANDS IN DANGER OF BEING MADE A SCAPEGOAT FOR THE MILITARY IN GENERAL.

9. TWO DEVELOPMENTS, NEITHER OF WHICH IS IMMEDIATELY ON THE HORIZON, COULD ENDANGER INDONESIA'S PRESENT GOVERNMENT AND BRING STUDENTS BACK INTO POLITICS WITH A VENGEANCE. THE FIRST WOULD BE OFFICIAL BUNGLING IN THE FACE OF SUSTAINED SERIOUS CRISIS, SUCH AS A PROLONGED FOOD SHORTAGE, OR A SERIES OF URBAN RIOTS SIMILAR TO THAT WHICH HIT BANDUNG ON AUGUST 5. UP TO NOW, HOWEVER, THE GOI HAS DISPLAYED AN ABILITY TO MOBILIZE RESERVES OF TALENT AND ENERGY TO DEAL WITH SUCH CRISES IN A FAIRLY INTELLIGENT MANNER (AND INCREASED FOREIGN EXCHANGE HOLDINGS PROVIDE A NEW MEANS TO DEAL WITH SHORT-TERM FOOD SHORTAGES.) SECOND AND FAR MORE SERIOUS WOULD BE A TOP-LEVEL SCHISM. THOSE INDONESIANS WHO THINK THAT POLITICAL CONVULSION WILL COME AGAIN SOONER OR LATER ARE VIRTUALLY UNANIMOUS IN THEIR CONVICTION THAT IT WILL BEGIN WITH DISUNITY AT HIGH LEVELS. HOWEVER, PRESIDENT SUHARTO HAS THUS FAR DISPLAYED A SURE TOUCH IN KEEPING HIS SUBORDINATES IN LINE. THE MORE IMPORTANT GENERALS HAVE CARVED OUT MUTUALLY COMPLEMENTARY (AND PERSONALLY PROFITABLE) ROLES WHICH THEY DO NOT WISH TO JEOPARDIZE BY FRATRICIDAL CONFLICT. THEY KNOW THAT DISUNITY AT THE TOP WOULD SOON ENCOURAGE AN OUTBURST OF PENT-UP SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC TENSIONS FROM BELOW. MOST OF THEM

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ARE JUST AS PATRIOTIC AS THE STUDENTS, AND JUST AS ANXIOUS TO PRESERVE THE NATIONAL UNITY, POLITICAL SECURITY, AND BEGINNINGS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THAT HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED SINCE 1966. IN SHORT, THEY HAVE EVERY REASON TO KEEP ON CO-EXISTING WITH

EACH OTHER.

10. WE MUST END BY REPEATING THE CLASSIC HEDGE:  
THE PROBLEMS THAT INDONESIA FACES ARE SO GREAT  
(AND THE UNCERTAINTIES OF THE POLITICAL PROCESS

SUFFICIENTLY NUMEROUS) THAT THE POSSIBILITY OF  
SUDDEN CATASTROPHES CAN NEVER BE RULED OUT. BUT  
ALTHOUGH THE STUDENTS WOULD NO DOUBT PLAY A ROLE,  
THEY WOULD PROBABLY BE PARTICIPANTS RATHER THAN  
INITIATORS OR CATALYSTS IN SUCH AN EVENT.  
NEVERTHELESS, WHAT THE STUDENTS HAVE DONE IN  
BANGKOK WILL STICK IN THE MINDS OF THE AUTHORITIES,  
AS WELL AS THE STUDENTS, IN INDONESIA, AND  
DOUBTLESS ELSEWHERE IN THE REGION, AND THE PROFOUND  
LESSON FOR EVERYONE IS THAT WHEN STUDENTS DO HAVE  
A CAUSE AND THE PUBLIC IS BEHIND THEM, NO MERE  
MILITARY FORCE CAN CONTAIN THEM.  
GALBRAITH

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